



ADMINISTRATIVE CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED STATES

Clarifying Statutory Access to Judicial Review of Agency Action

Committee on Judicial Review

Proposed Recommendation for Committee | July 22, 2021

1 Judicial review of federal administrative action is governed by numerous statutes,
2 including two general statutes, the Administrative Procedure Act (APA)¹ and the Hobbs Act,²
3 and hundreds of agency-specific statutes. Judicial review is also governed by judicially
4 developed doctrines.³ The APA’s judicial review provisions govern judicial review of agency
5 action generally and provide default rules that apply in the absence of any more specifically
6 applicable rules. Agency-specific statutes (referred to herein as “specific judicial review
7 statutes”) govern judicial review of actions of particular agencies (often, of particular actions of
8 particular agencies) and may provide specifically applicable rules that displace the general
9 provisions of the APA.⁴ Certain procedural aspects of judicial review are governed by federal
10 court rules that specify how to file a petition for review, the content of the record on review, and
11 other matters.⁵

12 The Administrative Conference of the United States undertook an initiative to identify
13 and review all statutory provisions in the *United States Code* governing judicial review of federal
14 agency rules and adjudicative orders.⁶ In the course of this initiative, the Conference observed

¹ 5 U.S.C. §§ 701–06.

² 28 U.S.C. §§ 2341–51.

³ See generally John F. Duffy, *Administrative Common Law in Judicial Review*, 77 TEX. L. REV. 113 (1998).

⁴ See 5 U.S.C. § 559, which provides that a “[s]ubsequent statute may not be held to supersede or modify . . . chapter 7 [of the APA] . . . except to the extent that it does so expressly.”

⁵ See FED. R. APP. P. 15–20.

⁶ See JONATHAN R. SIEGEL, ADMIN. CONF. OF THE U.S., SOURCEBOOK OF FEDERAL JUDICIAL REVIEW STATUTES (draft May 28, 2021).



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15 various ways in which some of these statutes create unnecessary obstacles to judicial review or
16 overly complicate the process of judicial review. The Conference recommends eliminating these
17 obstacles and complications in order to promote efficiency and fairness and to reduce
18 unnecessary litigation.⁷

19 This Recommendation is divided into two sections. The first section (Paragraphs 1–3)
20 recommends a set of drafting principles for Congress when it writes or amends specific judicial
21 review statutes. The second section (Paragraphs 4 and 5) recommends the preparation and
22 passage of a general judicial review statute (referred to below as “the general statute”) that would
23 cure problems in existing judicial review statutes. The Conference’s Office of the Chairman has
24 announced that it will prepare and submit to Congress a proposed statute for consideration that
25 would provide for the statutory changes in Paragraph 4. The specific topics covered in the
26 Recommendation are described below.

Specifying the Time Within Which to Seek Review

27 Judicial review statutes typically specify the time within which a party may seek judicial
28 review. The Conference’s review revealed two problems that some such statutes cause. First,
29 some specific judicial review statutes specify the time limit using an unusual formulation that
30 results in a time period one day shorter than might be expected. In cases involving these statutes,
31 some parties have lost their right to review because they sought review one day late. Such

⁷ This Recommendation is not intended to address all issues related to access to judicial review. For example, it does not address the time of accrual of a right of action under the general statute of limitations in 28 U.S.C. § 2401(a) (*see, e.g., Wind River Mining Corp. v. United States*, 946 F.2d 710 (9th Cir. 1991)); the extent to which judicial review remains available after the expiration of a time period specified in a special statute authorizing pre-enforcement review of agency rules (*see, e.g., PDR Network, LLC v. Carlton & Harris Chiropractic, Inc.*, 139 S. Ct. 2051 (2019)); the application of judge-made issue-exhaustion requirements in curtailing judicial review (*see, e.g., Carr v. Saul*, 141 S. Ct. 1352 (2021)); or whether Congress should specify where judicial review should be sought with regard to agency actions that are not currently the subject of any specific judicial review statute (*see* 5 U.S.C. § 703 (providing that review of such actions may be sought using “any applicable form of legal action . . . in a court of competent jurisdiction”). The Conference has addressed some of these issues in past recommendations. *See, e.g., Admin. Conf. of the U.S., Recommendation 82-7, Judicial Review of Rules in Enforcement Proceedings*, 47 Fed. Reg. 58208 (Dec. 30, 1982); Admin. Conf. of the U.S., Recommendation 75-3, *The Choice of Forum for Judicial Review of Administrative Action*, 40 Fed. Reg. 27926 (July 2, 1975).



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32 denials of review serve no substantial policy interest.⁸ Accordingly, Paragraph 1 provides that
33 Congress, when specifying the time within which to seek judicial review of agency action,
34 should use one of the usual forms of words and avoid the unusual forms.⁹ Paragraph 4(a)
35 provides that Congress should include in the recommended general judicial review statute a
36 provision that would add one day to the review period whenever a specific judicial review statute
37 uses one of the unusual forms, thus saving certain cases from dismissal.

38 The other problem relating to time limits is that some specific judicial review statutes do
39 not clearly identify the event that starts the time within which to seek review. In particular, some
40 specific judicial review statutes provide that the time for seeking review of an agency rule begins
41 when the rule is “issued” or “prescribed,” which has led to litigation about exactly what event
42 constitutes the “issu[ance]” of a rule.¹⁰ Paragraph 2 provides as a general matter that Congress
43 should clearly specify what event starts the time for seeking review of agency action. Paragraph
44 2 also provides that in drafting specific judicial review statutes providing for review of an agency
45 rule, Congress should provide that the time for review runs from the rule’s publication in the
46 *Federal Register*. Paragraph 4(b) provides that Congress should include in the general statute a
47 provision that whenever a time period for seeking judicial review begins upon the issuance of a
48 rule, the time starts when the rule is published in the *Federal Register*.¹¹

49 Direct, interim-final, and temporary rulemaking, in which an agency seeks and addresses
50 comments after publishing rules in the *Federal Register*, may raise unique issues with respect to
51 the timing of judicial review. Paragraphs 2 and 4(b) provide that Congress should extend the
52 time for seeking judicial review in these contexts.

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⁸ SIEGEL, *supra* note 8, at 26–30.

⁹ The recommended forms conform to those recommended by the drafting manuals of each house of Congress. *See* U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, HOUSE LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL’S MANUAL ON DRAFTING STYLE 57 (1995); U.S. SENATE, OFFICE OF THE LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL, LEGISLATIVE DRAFTING MANUAL 81–82 (1997).

¹⁰ SIEGEL, *supra* note 8, at 31–32.

¹¹ If the relevant judicial review statute is silent with regard to computing or extending the time within which to seek review, the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure and the Federal Rules of Appellate Procedure apply. *See* FED. R. CIV. P. 6; FED. R. APP. P. 26.



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Specifying the Name and Content of the Document by Which Review is Sought

53 When review is to be sought in a court of appeals, most specific judicial review statutes
54 provide that review should be sought by filing either a “petition for review” or a “notice of
55 appeal.” The term “petition for review” is more appropriate, as the term “appeal” suggests an
56 appellate court’s review of a decision by a lower court.¹² Paragraph 3 therefore provides that
57 specific judicial review statutes should direct parties to seek review in a court of appeals by filing
58 a petition for review. Problems sometimes arise when a party incorrectly titles the document. In
59 most such cases, the reviewing court treats the incorrect form as the correct one, but occasional
60 decisions refuse to save a party who has given the document the wrong name. Parties should not
61 lose their right to review by filing an incorrectly styled document.¹³ Paragraph 4(c) proposes to
62 solve this problem consistent with Paragraph 3’s preference for “petitions for review” in courts
63 of appeals.

64 Paragraph 3 also provides that when review is to be sought in district court, Congress
65 should provide that it be initiated by filing a complaint. District court litigators are accustomed to
66 initiating proceedings with a complaint, and courts are also accustomed to this terminology
67 because the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure contemplate the initiation of an action with the
68 filing of a complaint.¹⁴ Statutes calling for review to be initiated in district court by filing some
69 other document, such as a petition for review or notice of appeal, might be confusing. Paragraph
70 4(d) proposes a cure for this problem that is consistent with the Paragraph 3’s preference for
71 “complaints” in district courts.

72 Most specific judicial review statutes do not prescribe the content of the document used
73 to initiate review. This salutary practice allows the content of the document to be determined by
74 rules of court, such as Federal Rule of Appellate Procedure 15, which contains only minimal
75 requirements. A few unusual specific judicial review statutes prescribe the content of the petition

¹² SIEGEL, *supra* note 8, at 38–40; *see also* Garland v. Dai, 141 S. Ct. 1669 (2021).

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ FED. R. CIV. P. 3.



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76 for review in more detail. These requirements unnecessarily complicate judicial review.¹⁵
77 Paragraph 3 reminds Congress that specific judicial review statutes need not specify the required
78 content of a petition for review and that Congress may allow the content to be governed by the
79 applicable rules of court. Paragraph 4(e) provides that Congress should include in the general
80 statute a provision generally allowing documents initiating judicial review to comply either with
81 an applicable specific judicial review statute or an applicable rule of court.

Jurisdiction to Hear the Case

82 The Conference’s review uncovered another potential difficulty: some specific judicial
83 review statutes provide that parties should seek review of agency action in federal courts of
84 appeals but do not specify that these courts will have jurisdiction to hear the resulting cases. In
85 such a case, a court of appeals might question whether it has jurisdiction to consider the petition
86 for review.¹⁶ Accordingly, Paragraph 4(f) provides that Congress should include in the general
87 statute a provision that whenever a specific judicial review statute authorizes a party to seek
88 judicial review of agency action in a specified court, the court will have jurisdiction to consider
89 the resulting case.

Simultaneous Service Requirements

90 Another potential problem is that some specific judicial review statutes provide that the
91 party seeking judicial review of agency action must transmit the document initiating review to
92 the agency “simultaneously” with filing the document. Such a provision could cause a court to
93 question what should happen if a party seeking review serves the document initiating review on
94 the agency, but not “simultaneously” with filing the document. Although the Conference’s
95 review has found no cases dismissed due to such circumstances, the Conference is concerned
96 that a court might read the statutory text as requiring it to dismiss a petition for review based on

¹⁵ SIEGEL, *supra* note 8, at 40–41.

¹⁶ *Id.* at 35–37.



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97 the lack of simultaneous service.¹⁷ Paragraph 4(g) therefore provides that whenever a specific
98 judicial review statute requires a party seeking judicial review to serve a copy of the document
99 initiating review on the agency involved “simultaneously” with filing it, the service requirement
100 is satisfied if the document is served on the agency within the number of days specified in the
101 recommended general statute.

Race to the Courthouse, Revisited

102 The Conference’s Recommendation 80-5 addressed the “race to the courthouse” problem
103 that arises when multiple parties seek judicial review of the same agency action in different
104 circuits.¹⁸ In accordance with that recommendation, Congress provided by statute that in such
105 cases a lottery will determine which circuit will review the agency’s action. The statute,
106 however, provides that the lottery system applies only when an agency receives multiple
107 petitions for review “from the persons instituting the proceedings.”¹⁹ This provision has been
108 held not to apply to petitions for review forwarded to an agency by a court clerk, as some
109 specific judicial review statutes require. Parties invoking judicial review under such specific
110 judicial review statutes should be entitled to the benefit of the lottery system.²⁰ Paragraph 4(h)
111 provides that Congress should amend the “race to the courthouse” statute appropriately.

RECOMMENDATION

Recommendations to Congress When Drafting Judicial Review Provisions

112 1. When specifying the time within which a party may seek judicial review of agency
113 action, Congress should provide that a party may seek review “within” or “not later than”
114 a specified number of days after an agency action. Congress should avoid providing that

¹⁷ *Id.* at 41–45.

¹⁸ Admin. Conf. of the U.S., Recommendation 80-5, *Eliminating or Simplifying the “Race to the Courthouse” in Appeals from Agency Action*, 45 Fed. Reg. 84954 (Dec. 24, 1980).

¹⁹ 28 U.S.C. § 2112(a)(1).

²⁰ SIEGEL, *supra* note 8, at 42–45.



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115 a party may seek review “prior to” or “before” the day that is a specified number of days
116 after an agency action, or “within” or “before the expiration of” a period of a specified
117 number of days beginning on the date of an agency’s action. Examples of the
118 recommended forms are:

- 119 a. “A party seeking judicial review may file a petition for review within 30 days
120 after” the agency’s action.
- 121 b. “A party seeking judicial review may file a petition for review not later than 30
122 days after” the agency’s action.

123 Examples of the forms to be avoided are:

- 124 c. “A party seeking judicial review may file a petition for review prior to [or
125 “before”] the 30th day after” the agency’s action.
- 126 d. “A party seeking judicial review may file a petition for review within [or “before
127 the expiration of”] the 30-day period beginning on the date of” the agency’s
128 action.

- 129 2. Congress should clearly specify what event starts the time for seeking review. Where the
130 event is the promulgation, amendment, or repeal of a rule, and must be published in the
131 Federal Register. Congress should provide that the event date is the date of the
132 publication of the rule in the *Federal Register*, ~~where the rule is so published.~~ Where an
133 agency issues a direct, interim-final, or temporary rule with an opportunity to comment
134 after the rule has been published in the *Federal Register*, Congress should extend the
135 time for seeking review by the length of the period up to and including the effective date
136 of the rule.
- 137 3. When drafting a statute providing for review in a court of appeals, Congress should
138 provide that review should be initiated by filing a petition for review. When drafting a
139 statute providing for review in a district court, Congress should provide that review
140 should be initiated by filing a complaint. With regard to either kind of statute, Congress

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141 should be aware that it need not specify the required content of the document initiating
142 judicial proceedings because that matter would be governed by the applicable court rules.

General Judicial Review Statute

143 4. Congress should enact a new general judicial review statute that includes these
144 provisions:

- 145 a. Whenever a specific judicial review statute provides that a party may seek judicial
146 review of an agency’s action “prior to” or “before” the day that is a specified
147 number of days after an agency’s action, or “within” or “before the expiration of”
148 a period of a specific number of days beginning on the date of an agency’s action,
149 review may also be sought exactly that number of days after the agency’s action.
- 150 b. Whenever a specific judicial review statute provides that the event that starts the
151 time for seeking judicial review is the promulgation, amendment, or repeal of a
152 rule, the event date shall be the date of the publication of the rule in the *Federal*
153 *Register*. To address situations in which an agency issues a direct, interim-final,
154 or temporary rule with an opportunity to comment after the rule has been
155 published in the *Federal Register*, the time for seeking review should be extended
156 by the length of the period up to and including the effective date of the rule.
- 157 c. Statutes authorizing judicial review in a court of appeals by the filing of a notice
158 of appeal will be construed as authorizing judicial review by the filing of a
159 petition for review, and whenever a party seeking judicial review in a court of
160 appeals styles the document initiating review as a notice of appeal, the court will
161 treat that document as a petition for review.
- 162 d. Statutes authorizing judicial review in a district court by the filing of a notice of
163 appeal, petition for review, or other petition will be construed as authorizing
164 judicial review by the filing of a complaint, and whenever a party seeking judicial
165 review in a district court styles the document initiating review as a notice of
166 appeal, petition for review, or other petition, the court will treat that document as
167 a complaint.

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- 168 e. Whenever a specific judicial review statute specifies the required content of a
169 document that initiates judicial review, a party may initiate review with a
170 document that complies with the requirements of that statute or a document that
171 complies with the applicable rules of court.
- 172 f. Whenever a specific judicial review statute provides that a party may seek judicial
173 review of an agency action in a specified federal court, the specified federal court
174 will have jurisdiction to hear the resulting case.
- 175 g. Whenever a specific judicial review statute requires that a party seeking review
176 serve the document initiating review on the agency that ~~issued the order~~took the
177 ~~action~~ of which review is sought “simultaneously” with filing the document, this
178 requirement is satisfied if the document is served on the agency within a
179 reasonable but specific number of days, such as seven or fourteen days either
180 before or after filing.
- 181 h. Congress should amend 28 U.S.C. § 2112(a)(1) by striking the phrase “, from the
182 persons instituting the proceedings, the” and inserting “a” in its place, in both
183 places where the phrase occurs.
- 184 5. The Conference’s Office of the Chairman should prepare and submit to Congress a
185 proposed ~~general~~ judicial review statute for consideration that would provide for the
186 statutory changes in Paragraph 4.

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